

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----097213 080449Z /14
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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6665
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL BELIZE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE
USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 4263

EXDIS
E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PBOR, MPOL, GT, BH, UK
SUBJECT: BELIZE

REF: STATE 158054

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT LAUGERUD WELCOMED ASSURANCES REFTEL, PARTICULARLY BRITISH STATEMENT THAT THEY WOULD NOT SURPRISE GUATEMALA WITH SUDDEN GRANT OF INDEPENDENCE TO BELIZE. HE HAS ALSO RECEIVED LETTER AND ORAL MESSAGE FROM PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN THAT THERE WILL BE NO QUOTE EARLY UNQUOTE MOVE TO INDEPENDENCE, AND A REPORT FROM GUATEMALAN DELEGATION IN WASHINGTON THAT ROWLANDS WANTS TO COME TO GUATEMALA NEXT WEEK. LAUGERUD WILL BE QUOTE MORE THAN GLAD UNQUOTE TO SEE ROWLANDS, BUT SAID THAT NONE OF THESE ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS WILL RELIEVE MILITARY PRESSURE ON HIM TO REINFORCE ALONG BORDER AS RESPONSE TO BRITISH REINFORCEMENTS. LAUGERUD ASKED IF USG COULD PERSUADE HMG TO WITHDRAW TROOPS IT FLEW INTO BELIZE THURSDAY, AND IMPLIED THAT IN ABSENCE OF SOME SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN LEVEL OF BRITISH FORCES WITHIN NEXT 48 OR 72 HOURS HE WILL BE UNDER STRONG PRESSURE TO MOVE TWO

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BATTALIONS TO THE BORDER AREA. END SUMMARY

2. AMBASSADOR, ACCOMPANIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR, CALLED ON PRESIDENT LAUGERUD 4 PM THURSDAY AT PRESIDENT'S REQUEST. PRESIDENT SAID BRITISH CONSUL WILLIAM MCQUILLAN HAD JUST DELIVERED A LETTER AND ORAL MESSAGE FROM PRIME MINISTER CALLAGHAN TO LAUGERUD, AND PRESIDENT WANTED

TO SHARE THE LETTER AND OTHER INFORMATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR. ORAL MESSAGE FROM CALLAGHAN WAS THAT THERE IS NOT GOING TO BE ANY EARLY INDEPENDENCE FOR BELIZE. PRESIDENT SAID HE ASKED MCQUILLAN HOW SOON IS EARLY, AND MCQUILLAN WAS, AS HE HAD EXPECTED, UNABLE BE MORE SPECIFIC. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE (STATE 158577), CALLAGHAN LETTER CONTAINED FIRST ADMISSION TO THE GOG THAT HARRIERS ARE ON THE WAY, PLUS QUOTE SOME ADDITIONAL TROOPS UNQUOTE, AND FIRST NEWS TO EITHER GOG OR TO US THAT AIRPORT DEFENSES BEING STRENGTHENED AND QUOTE SOME OF HER MAJESTY'S SHIPS UNQUOTE (PLURAL) BEING SENT TO BELIZE. HOWEVER, AMBASSADOR DID NOT COMMENT ON LETTER AND PRESIDENT COMMENTED ONLY ON THE REFERENCE TO HARRIERS AND THE EARLIER NEWS OF VC-10 TRANSPORTS AND A SINGLE FRIGATE.

4. PRESIDENT NOTED PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT THAT BRITISH HAVE APPROACHED TALKS IN GOOD FAITH. HE SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE DISPATCH OF HARRIERS AND THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTED GOOD FAITH. UK OBVIOUSLY WANTED NEGOTIATE WITH POWERFUL, SOPHISTICATED WEAPONRY IN PLACE IN HOPES OF INTIMIDATING GUATEMALA. PRESIDENT ALSO NOTED CALLAGHAN STATEMENT THAT GOG COMMUNIQUE OF JUNE 12 IMPLICATING UK IN SUPPORT FOR LEFTIST SUBVERSION IN GUATEMALA WAS INFLUENTIAL IN DECISION TO REINFORCE. PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD RECEIVED REPORTS FROM FRIENDS OF GUATEMALA WHO HAD GOOD CONNECTIONS WITH GOVERNMENTS OF COSTA RICA, PANAMA, SECRET

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AND MEXICO, TO THE EFFECT THAT GUERRILLA ACTIVITY IN GUATEMALA WOULD BE INTENSIFIED IN JULY IN THREE OR FOUR AREAS SIMULTANEOUSLY, SO THAT GUATEMALAN ARMY WOULD BE UNABLE TO REACT QUICKLY TO A SURPRISE BRITISH MOVE WITH REGARD TO BELIZE. HE WAS CONFIDENT OF ACCURACY OF THESE REPORTS BUT DID NOT KNOW IF BRITISH SUPPORTING OR EVEN AWARE OF PLAN FOR INCREASED SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY. HE DID NOT BELIEVE BRITISH WERE. AMBASSADOR SAID NEITHER DID HE.

5. PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD SCHEDULED AN AIRLIFT OF AN INFANTRY BATTALION FROM THE GUARDIA DE HONOR BRIGADE IN GUATEMALA CITY TO THE BORDER AREA ON TUESDAY MORNING, JULY 5. AFTER RECEIVING A REPORT ON AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON ACTING FONMIN OBIOLS MORNING OF JULY 4, AND LEARNING OF USG REQUEST FOR PRUDENCE BY GOG, PRESIDENT HAD CANCELLED THE ORDER. GUATEMALA HAD THE SAME NUMBER OF TROOPS, THE SAME TEN ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS, AND ONE FIELD ARTILLERY BATTERY IT HAD HAD IN THE PETEN FOR OVER A YEAR. IT HAD NOT REINFORCED BY A SINGLE SOLDIER. IN ADDITION, PRESIDENT HAD ORDERED ALL GUATEMALAN TROOPS TO STAY AT LEAST TEN KILOMETERS AWAY FROM THE BELIZE BORDER, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE PLATOON WHICH HAS BEEN

PERMANENTLY STATIONED AT MODESTO MENDEZ AND THE PLATOON STATIONED AT MELCHOR DE MENCOS FOR MANY YEARS. THESE TWO PLATOONS ARE THE ONLY TROOPS EXCEPTED FROM THE PRESIDENT'S ORDER TO STAY AWAY FROM THE BORDER.

6. HOWEVER, LATER ON MORNING OF JULY 4, GUATEMALAN CONSUL IN BELIZE HAD REPORTED ARRIVAL OF BRITISH FRIGATE. PRESIDENT UNDERSTOOD NEED FOR PRUDENCE AND RESTRAINT BY BOTH SIDES. BUT FRIGATE WAS THERE, AND REPORTEDLY UNLOADING LARGE CRATES OF EQUIPMENT. PRESIDENT THEN READ TO THE AMBASSADOR A LIST OF INCIDENTS OF ALLEGED INCURSIONS BY BRITISH FORCES ACROSS THE BORDER, EXPRESSING PARTICULAR CONCERN ABOUT A NIGHTTIME OVERFLIGHT OF THE GUATEMALAN BASE AT POPTUN ON JUNE 23. BASE COMMANDER
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TELEPHONED LAUGERUD AT 1 AM TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO FIRE ON HELICOPTER HE COULD HEAR OVERHEAD, BUT PRESIDENT REFUSED PERMISSION ON GROUNDS THERE WAS NOTHING BRITISH WERE NOT WELCOME TO SEE AND PHOTOGRAPH. ON JULY 6 HMG HAD REINFORCED ITS BORDER OBSERVATION POINT ACROSS RIVER FROM MODESTO MENDEZ FROM PREVIOUS TOTAL OF NINE TO NEW TOTAL OF 400. ON JULY 7 TWENTY BRITISH VC-10'S BEGAN FLYING INTO BELIZE WITH 3,000 ADDITIONAL TROOPS. MINISTER OF DEFENSE HAD TELEPHONED LAUGERUD AS SOON AS HE HEARD THIS NEWS AND ASKED FOR PERMISSION TO GO AHEAD WITH THE AIRLIFT OF NOT ONE BUT TWO BATTALIONS TO THE BORDER. PRESIDENT TOLD HIS MINISTER (AS HE HAD PREVIOUSLY INFORMED THE AMBASSADOR -- GUATEMALA 4244) TO PLACE THE BATTALIONS ON READY ALERT, BUT NOT TO MOVE THEM WITHOUT A PERSONAL, DIRECT ORDER FROM THE PRESIDENT.

7. LAUGERUD SAID MUCH OF THIS INFORMATION WAS REGARDED BY GUATEMALA AS SECRET, BUT HE HANDED THE AMBASSADOR TWO FILE FOLDERS OF LISTS OF BORDER INCIDENTS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF BRITISH FORCES AND EQUIPMENT (BEING POUCHED) AS A QUOTE RENEWED EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE IN

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6666

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL BELIZE IMMEDIATE

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AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE

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YOUR PEOPLE AND YOUR GOVERNMENT UNQUOTE.

8. PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD RECEIVED A CALL THURSDAY AFTERNOON FROM COLONEL MALDONADO, HIS AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON, WHO REPORTED THAT BRITISH UNDER SECRETARY ROWLANDS HAD SAID HE WOULD FLY BACK TO LONDON AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE WASHINGTON TALKS BUT WOULD LIKE TO COME TO GUATEMALA NEXT WEEK TO SEE LAUGERUD. MALDONADO ASKED IF PRESIDENT WILLING RECEIVE ROWLANDS. LAUGERUD SAID HE HAD REPLIED HE WOULD BE MORE THAN GLAD TO SEE HIM; HE WAS WILLING TO TALK TO THE DEVIL HIMSELF IF IT WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND AVOID A WAR. HE HAD TOLD MCQUILLAN EARLIER THAT A WAR WOULD ONLY BLEED BOTH COUNTRIES TO THE BENEFIT OF THIRD PARTIES SUCH AS CUBA AND PANAMA WHO WANTED EXPLOIT SITUATION. LAUGERUD DID NOT WANT A VIET NAM OR AN ANGOLA IN CENTRAL AMERICA. HE UNDERSTOOD THAT BRITISH MUST BE ABLE TO LEAVE BELIZE WITH HONOR. BUT THEY MUST RECIPROCATATE AND PERMIT GUATEMALA TO LIVE WITH HONOR AS WELL. THE PRESURE HE MOST FEARED WAS THE PRESURE HE WAS INCREASINGLY
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RECEIVING FROM THE ARMY. THEY CANNOT BE HUMILIATED, AND THERE WAS A POINT BEYOND WHICH THEY COULD NOT BE PUSHED.

9. AT THIS POINT EMBASSY OFFICER ARRIVED WITH REFTEL. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED HIS PLEASURE AT NEWS OF BRITISH DECISION TO SEND ROWLANDS AND PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO RECEIVE HIM. HE THEN READ REFTEL (MINUS FYI PORTION) TO PRESIDENT. LAUGERUD SAID THE MESSAGE WAS A MOST WELCOME ASSURANCE, PARTICULARLY THE BRITISH STATEMENT THEY THEY WOULD NOT TAKE GUATEMALA BY SURPRISE.

10. HOWEVER, LAUGERUD SAID, WHY IF HE HAD NOT MOVED A SINGLE SOLDIER, HAD THE BRITISH MOVED THREE THOUSAND? WHY DO THE BRITISH CLAIM AS JUSTIFICATION FOR THEIR MOVEMENT A NON-EXISTENT GUATEMALAN DEPLOYMENT? HE READ FROM A REUTERS DISPATCH FROM LONDON REPORTING A FOREIGN OFFICE COMMUNIQUE (STATE 158590), WHICH REFERS TO QUOTE A MAJOR DEPLOYMENT OF (GUATEMALAN) REGULAR TROOPS ON THE BORDER WITH BELIZE UNQUOTE. THERE WILL BE GREAT PRESSURE ON HIM TO REINFORCE ALONG THE BORDER, HE SAID, BUT HE WILL NOT DO SO UNLESS THERE IS A STRONG REQUIREMENT TO DO SO OR HE SENSES SOME THREAT TO GUATEMALA. CAN USG, PRESIDENT ASKED, DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS MASSIVE MOVEMENT OF BRITISH TROOPS? COULD THE SITUATION BE DEFUSED BY INFORMING WASHINGTON THAT GUATEMALA HAS NOT MOVED A SINGLE SOLDIER?

11. AMBASSADOR SAID HE HAD SO INFORMED DEPARTMENT THURSDAY MORNING (GUATEMALA 4244). PRESIDENT SAID BRITISH NEVERTHELESS ARE STILL FLYING IN THE VC-10'S. NEWS WILL BE IN PAPERS FRIDAY MORNING AND HE WILL HAVE TO SEND TROOPS TO THE PETEN. AMBASSADOR RECALLED THAT PRESIDENT THAT MORNING HAD SAID HE WOULD HOLD OFF UNTIL
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HE HEARD FURTHER FROM US. PRESIDENT HAD NOW HEARD THE LATEST MESSAGE FROM WASHINGTON, AND AMBASSADOR HOPED THE PRESIDENT FOUND ENOUGH POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN THAT MESSAGE AND IN THE NEWS OF THE ROWLANDS VISIT TO BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO HOLD BACK ON TROOP MOVEMENTS. HE REALIZED THAT IT MIGHT APPEAR TO GOG THAT IT WAS BEING ASKED TO EXERCISE MOST OF THE RESTRAINT, BUT THE PROCESS OF ESCALATION MUST BE STOPPED. IT SEEMED TO THE AMBASSADOR FROM WHAT WE NOW KNEW OF BOTH SIDES' POSITIONS THAT THERE WAS LITTLE PROSPECT OF HOSTILITIES. GUATEMALA'S POSITION IS THAT IT WILL NOT ATTACK SHORT OF A GRANT OF INDEPENDENCE. BRITAIN'S POSITION IS THAT IT WILL NOT SURPRISE GUATEMALA WITH ANY SUDDEN MOVE TOWARD SUCH A GRANT. PRESIDENT INTERRUPTED TO ASKED IF AMBASSADOR TRUSTED THE BRITISH ASSURANCE. AMBASSADOR SAID HE DID. HE URGED PRESIDENT TO DELAY ANY TROOP MOVEMENTS, CERTAINLY AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER PRESIDENT HAD HAD A CHANCE TO SEE ROWLANDS.

12. PRESIDENT SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE WITHIN 48 OR 72 HOURS EITHER TO MOVE THE TWO BATTALIONS OR TO CANCEL THEIR ALERT STATUS. HE WOULD TALK WITH HIM DEFENSE MINISTER AND CHIEF OF STAFF TONIGHT AND TELL THEM OF THE ROWLANDS VISIT AND HIS CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR. BUT HE WAS NOT CONFIDENT THE PRESSURE WOULD BE RELIEVED. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE TROOPS THAT ARRIVED ON THE

VC-10'S WERE TO RETURN TO BRITAIN WITHIN 48 OR 72 HOURS,
THAT WOULD TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF.

13. AMBASSADOR SAID WE HAD ALREADY BEEN URGING RESTRAINT
AND CAUTION ON BOTH SIDES. PRESIDENT ASKED THAT WE TELL
HMG REASON HE HAS NOT MOVED TROOPS IS BECAUSE QUOTE
A COUNTRY WE TRUST AND LOVE ASKED US NOT TO, NOT BECAUSE
WE WERE INTIMIDATED BY BRITAIN AND ITS SOPHISTICATED
WEAPONS. WE WANT TO CONTINUE TO HONOR THAT REQUEST,
BUT IF WE ARE TO DO SO, WE NEED RECIPROCITY FROM THE
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BRITISH UNQUOTE.

14. AT END OF 85-MINUTE CONVERSATION, PRESIDENT ASKED
THAT AMBASSADOR TELEPHONE HIM IMMEDIATELY IF THERE
SHOULD BE ANY NEWDEVELOPEMNT. HE ASKED IF AMBASSADOR
WOULD OBJECT TO PRESIDENT'S HAVING A SPECIAL DIRECT
TELEPHONE LINE, LINKING PRESIDENT AND HIS CABINET,
INSTALLED IN AMBASSADOR'S OFFICE AND RESIDENCE, SO AS
TO MAKE IMMEDIATE COMMUNICATION POSSIBLE. AMBASSADOR
SAID HE WOULD BE PLEASED TO HAVE THIS LINK.

15. COMMENT: I CANNOT BE CERTAIN THAT PRESIDENT WILL
BE ABLE TO WITHSATND PRESSURE FROM HIS MILITARY TO MOVE
THE TWO ADDITIONAL BATTALIONS TO PETEN, BUT IT WAS OUR
IMPRESSION FROM HIS STATEMENTS IN THIS MEETING THAT HE
WILL ATTEMPT TO DO SO. IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY STRENGTHEN HIS
HAND IMMEASURABLY IF HE COULD POINT TO SOME SIGN OF
DE-ESCALATION ON BRITISH SIDE. I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT
THERE IS LITTLE DANGER THAT GUATEMALA WILL TAKE MILITARY
ACTION SHORT OF BRITISH UNILATERAL GRANT OF INDEPENDENCE,
SO THAT ANY BRITISH DE-ESCALATION WOULD CARRY LITTLE REAL
RISK AND INDEED WOULD BE THE BEST POSSIBLE MEANS OF
AVOIDING CONFRONTATION. IT WOULD ESTABLISH THE RIGHT
CKIMATE FOR ROWLANDS VISIT HERE.
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Message Attributes

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Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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